

Illinois Gender Advocates



Advocacy for the Transgender and Gender Variant Community

A §501(c)(3) Charitable Organization

Volume 2 Issue 10

October 2003

IGA to Receive Rainbow Spirit Award

On Saturday, November 15, 2003, the New Spirit Metropolitan Community Church of Oak Park will honor the Illinois Gender Advocates by presenting us with the prestigious Rainbow Spirit Award. The Rainbow Spirit Award recognizes individuals and organizations who help create opportunities for the LGBT communities, and all communities, to flourish and grow in a healthy and positive environment through education, fine arts, health care, religion, social service, politics/government, and corporate life. The presentation will be made at a formal, black-tie event to be held at the Westin Michigan Avenue, located at 909 N. Michigan Ave. in Chicago.

The other honorees for this year's awards are Illinois State Senator Carol Ronen and Alexandra Billings. Senator Ronen, who has had a distinguished career as a legislator, is being particularly recognized as the lead sponsor of S.B. 101, the bill that seeks to add sexual orientation and gender identity to the state human rights statute. Ms. Billings is a transgender actress and singer whose artistic achievements serve as an inspiration and role model for the transgender community.

The awards will be presented in the midst of an evening of entertainment, dining, and dancing. The evening starts at 6:00 p.m. with a silent auction, hors d'oeuvres and a cash bar, during which time entertainment will be provided by the unique and delightful sounds of the Lakeside Pride Clarinet Choir.

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**The Next Meeting of
Illinois Gender Advocates
Will Take Place at 7:30 p.m. on
Thursday, October 2, 2003
And Will Be Held at
New Spirit MC Church
542 S. Scoville Avenue
In Oak Park**

Miranda Writes...

Killing Us Softly

By Miranda Stevens-Miller

In the news last week was a story about illegal silicone injections that killed three Houston area transgender women within recent months. A person jailed for at least one of the Houston deaths was a transgender woman. And earlier this year in Florida, another transgender woman was sentenced for her role in the death of a transgender woman who died after being "pumped" with silicone.

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IGA to Receive Rainbow Spirit Award

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A first-class dinner (vegetarian alternative available) will be served at 7:45 p.m. As with all other aspects of the awards celebration, the dinner hour will include live entertainment of the highest quality. Russ Long, an extremely talented local pianist, is scheduled to perform.

Following dinner and the presentation of the awards, there will be a live show featuring the Hysterical Women, Chicago's own lesbian stand-up comedy troupe.

The evening will conclude with dancing to the music of Pulsation from about 9:30 p.m. to midnight.

Tickets for the Rainbow Spirit Awards begin at \$150 per person, and may be purchased by contacting Beth Plotner, Diana Williamson, Marsha Jackson, or Rebecca Davis. All tickets will be held at the door. Payment may be made by check, VISA, or Master Card.

Tickets purchased for \$250 or more will entitle the participant to attend a VIP Champagne Reception from 6:00 to 6:30 p.m., where there will be entertainment by the truly incredible Nan Mason. Purchasers of VIP tickets will also receive their own personal advertisement in the program book.

Proceeds from the event will go toward furthering the valuable activities of the New Spirit Metropolitan Community Church, where all LGBT people are welcome at all times. Regardless of one's religious convictions, New Spirit MCC is deserving of our support as a community institution that is truly transgender inclusive. The price of a ticket will not only bring an evening of extraordinary dining and entertainment, but is also money well spent on behalf of our community. All members of IGA are strongly encouraged to attend the Rainbow Spirit Awards celebration.

Miranda Writes...

(Continued from Page 1)

We can track the hate crime murders. They get reported and recorded as hate crimes. It has been fairly consistent over the past few years. There have been one or two hate-related murders of transgender people per month for the past decade or more. These are deaths at the hands of our enemies. But the deaths that are at the hands of our friends are harder to track.

The number of deaths at the hands of kind strangers who promise to add a few feminine curves may be as many as the number of hate-crime murders. We are killing ourselves, and we are killing ourselves softly with kindness.

There has long been an underground network of "pump doctors" who traffic in "get curves quick" schemes. In the

past, medical grade silicone was used for pumping. This is the kind of silicone that had been used for breast implants. But as the supply of high purity sterile silicone has become scarcer, the underground has turned to industrial grades of silicone. These less expensive materials are used primarily as fluids for machinery, such as brake fluids in automobiles. They are crude and they are far from sterile. I have heard of individuals who have had five or more liters of this stuff pumped into their bodies over a period of time.

You've got to be asking yourself at this point, what drives someone to pump brake fluid into her body. Lois Bates, who runs the Transgender Woman Support and Treatment Group, explained it very simply at a workshop on trans youth earlier this year. "In the trans community, appearance and passing are very important. It is very important to maintain body image, and it is valued above other important aspects of life."

You may have a hard time understanding this obsession with body image among some of the transgender community. But realize that life is hard in a world where your gender identity is constantly denied and ridiculed. Unless you look like the gender you identify as, you are constantly being "clocked", harassed and often assaulted. It is like you have a target painted on your back. The most violent hate crimes are always visited upon those who are most visibly different. If you can "pass" in your gender, then you can avoid all this.

But more than avoidance of violence, passing is an affirmation of one's identity. And for someone who has been denied that affirmation their whole lives by their family and by their community, desperation can often override judgement. Pumping silicone is an easy solution. It costs only a small fraction of the cost of plastic surgery, and it has immediate rewards. Hormones take years to have their effect... silicone takes no time at all. And in a world where affirmation and acceptance of your gender identity can mean the difference between having a family and a home, or being out on the streets in constant fear of being bashed, the immediate fix is the more attractive alternative.

But before you make that choice, please look at the risks. Besides the rash of deaths that have been reported recently, injected silicone has been implicated in all sorts of medical problems that lead to a shorter life expectancy. It migrates into the soft tissues where it causes chronic inflammation. It has been linked with respiratory diseases, toxic shock syndrome, cancer, and severe autoimmune and connective tissue disorders. And it eventually migrates, changes shape and hardens. It can be dislodged by trauma and by gravity.

How many deaths does it take before we come to our senses and realize the price of those curves is substantially more than the few hundred dollars that it costs for the silicone injections.

Miranda Stevens-Miller welcomes your comments at MirandaSt1@aol.com

How to contact us...

Illinois Gender Advocates

47 W. Division St., #391
Chicago, IL 60610

Telephone Hotline:

312-409-5489

Please leave a message. We will get back to you as quickly as possible.

TYRA Youth Hotline:

312-217-1120

E-Mail:

IGA@genderadvocates.org

Web Site Address:

<http://www.genderadvocates.org>

Whatever

The More the Merrier

By Beth Plotner

A number of years ago when I started practicing law as an out Transgender Attorney I couldn't find any other "out" TG attorneys here in Illinois. Yes, I knew or knew of several around the country but I seemed to be the only one locally at the time. So as far as I know I was the first out TG attorney here in Illinois. If there was someone before me, please let me know.

For at least a couple of years I seemed to be the only one. I had been and still do get approached periodically from attorneys who are in the closet. They tell me they wish they could practice "out." I understand many of their situations and if and when they come out they will do it when they are ready. But we've always had TG attorneys here in Illinois I bet even back in Abe Lincoln's day there were TG attorneys just not out.

Well it seems that I am no longer alone. I now know of a number of TG attorneys who are out. Practicing law in their true gender. Some of my colleagues are in private practice others are not. Ok, so I'm no longer unique. Thank God.

Once again, society has survived. The Illinois Bar is still intact. The only recent changes in the Illinois legal community concerning gender identity is that the Illinois State Bar Association now has a standing committee on sexual

orientation and *gender identity*, and it also recently added gender identity to its anti-discrimination policy.

What my colleagues may or may not realize is that in addition, to their client or employer, they are also advocating for our community. As we demonstrate that basically we are attorneys who just happen to be Transgender we show other lawyers, judges and the public that we are functional contributing members of society. As I have lost my uniqueness we will lose our uniqueness. Not by numbers but that we're here and we practice our profession the same as others.

The impression we make helps everyone just as our sisters and brothers throughout the community do the same in their various walks of life. More and more we become a real part of society. Yes, society is changing at a glacial pace but there is progress and we're part of it.

So when's the first meeting of our bar association?

Minutes for the Monthly Meeting of September 2003

By Diana Williamson

The meeting was called to order at 7:35 p.m. on Thursday, September 4, 2003, in the New Spirit Metropolitan Community Church, 542 S. Scoville Avenue, Oak Park, Illinois. In attendance at the meeting were Beth Plotner (Chair), Diana Williamson (who was acting as Secretary due to the illness of Rebecca Davis), and nine other participants.

Legislative Updates: Beth Plotner reported that there has been essentially no change in the status of S.B. 101 since it was passed out of committee. The bill may come up for a vote in the Senate in November, however. There was also a renewed discussion regarding the desirability of encouraging a grass-roots support movement through various religious institutions throughout the state, which had been originally suggested by Rev. Bradley Mickelson at last month's meeting.

In other legislative matters, it is hoped that a safe schools bill will be introduced in the Illinois legislature in the spring of 2004. It was noted that California's transgender civil rights bill had been adopted and signed into law by the governor. The city of San Diego, CA has also adopted a transgender rights ordinance.

At the federal level, Rep. Barney Frank of Massachusetts apparently intends to introduce a non-inclusive Employment Non-Discrimination Bill. HRC, however, is attempting to have a separate bill introduced that will be transgender inclusive. The legislation supported by HRC would be a general civil rights measure, and would therefore preempt the provisions of any non-inclusive ENDA that might be passed.

Youth: Beth Plotner reported that TYRA is slowly gathering strength and support. On an average, 3 – 4 young people now attend each of the Wednesday evening support group meetings. Howard Brown Health Center will encourage additional participation.

Legal Updates: Beth Plotner reported about the Kanteras case, a divorce proceeding in Florida in which the marriage between a transgender husband and a genetic female wife was held to be valid, and in which custody of the couple's children was granted to the husband. The wife in that case has now appealed the judgment of the trial court. Apparently, a conservative organization in Arizona is funding the wife's appeal.

Beth further reported about "Sterling's" case. Although the facts of Sterling's case closely parallel those of the Kanteras case, a Cook County Circuit Court judge decided that Sterling was female, regardless of his gender identity, and that his marriage to a genetic woman was void because it was a marriage between two women. Custody of the couple's child was given to the wife, despite the strong recommendation of the Cook County Guardian that Sterling was by far the superior parent. Motions for reconsideration of that judgment, filed on behalf of Sterling and by the Guardian, have been denied. A formal appeal will be filed shortly. The Guardian will attempt to appeal the case directly to the Illinois Supreme Court in order to have final resolution to the matter at the earliest possible time.

Beth also reported on the Fink case, a divorce case involving a marriage between a genetic male and a transgender woman that is currently pending in the Cook County Circuit Court. Although there are no children involved, the husband in that case is a wealthy physician who is attempting to avoid a property distribution with his wife. The matter is set for trial later this month.

Finally, Beth reported that the husband in the Fink case has filed a lawsuit against the Cook County Clerk, alleging that his marriage license was fraudulently issued. Such allegations are somewhat bizarre, considering the fact that the husband was fully aware that his wife was a transgender woman at the time of their marriage. The husband was, therefore, a knowing participant in the "fraud."

IGA-TV: IGA's next program on Chicago cable access television will be aired on Friday, September 12, starting at 6:30 p.m. Beth Plotner will serve as host of the program, and will interview psychologist Marge Witty, Ph.D.

Remembering Our Dead Vigil: The third annual Remembering Our Dead Vigil will be held on Wednesday, November 19, starting at 6:00 p.m. The vigil will take place outside the Thompson Center, located at the corner of Randolph and Clark Streets in Chicago, and will commemorate those transgender individuals throughout the world who have been killed as a result of hate crimes during the preceding year.

Upcoming Events: The AIDS Walk will take place on Saturday, September 20. IGA will not have a team this year, but may become involved in voter registration efforts during the walk.

The Creating Change conference will take place in Miami Beach, FL from November 5 through 9. Beth Plotner, Diana Williamson, and Miranda Stevens-Miller will be attending on behalf of IGA. Other IGA members are invited to attend, as well.

The Rainbow Spirit Awards will be held on the evening of Saturday, November 15, and will take place at the Westin Michigan Avenue. This is a formal, black tie dinner/dance that will include IGA among the honorees. IGA will also receive 10% of the net proceeds from the event. Everyone is strongly encouraged to attend this gala event.

Nominations: Nominations for the offices of Chair and Vice Chair for next year will be made at our next meeting on October 2. All persons interested in seeking either such office are encouraged to attend the meeting.

Future Activities: We are seeking to become involved in a voter registration drive, intended to coincide with the presidential election year of 2004. Also scheduled to begin next year will be a series of informal gatherings at which featured speakers will make presentations, followed by socializing among those attending.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Diana Williamson

Be Sure to Attend Our Next Meeting; Nomination of Officers

Our next regular meeting will be held on Thursday, October 2, 2003, at 7:30 p.m. at the New Spirit Metropolitan Community Church, located at 542 S. Scoville Avenue in Oak Park. Please enter by the side door on Adams Street, then go up the stairs and turn right to the meeting room. Ample free parking is available on the street.

The main item on the agenda for the October meeting will be the nomination of officers for the following year. Under the Bylaws, nominations will be accepted for the offices of Chair and Vice Chair.

Any members in good standing may be nominated for either office. If you wish, you may nominate yourself. You do not have to be present at the meeting to be nominated, but you should notify someone who will be present that you wish to be

nominated and will accept the nomination and discharge the duties of the office, if elected.

The election of officers will take place at the Annual Meeting to be held on November 13, 2003. All members in good standing will be entitled to vote for officers, either in person at the meeting or by mail.

Thanks to Our Contributors:

A big thank you goes out to those who contributed articles to the newsletter this month. It is really appreciated from month to month. Thanks!!

- Miranda Stevens-Miller
- Diana Williamson
- NTAC
- Beth Plotner
- GenderPAC News

Students to Fight Gender Bullying and Violence in Local Schools and the Community

From GenderPAC News

WASHINGTON, D.C. (September 9, 2003) – The Gender Public Advocacy Coalition (GenderPAC) applauded student leaders who are launching the first college GenderROOTS chapters and affiliations around the country as schools re-open for the Fall 2003 school year.

The chapters and affiliations are part of GenderPAC's GenderYOUTH Network, which supports student activists in organizing effective local initiatives to fight gender-based bullying, discrimination and violence on campus and in local high schools, using peer-to-peer outreach, grassroots organizing, and community education.

“These students are pioneers in the struggle to raise community and media awareness of the bullying and violence against youth who transcend narrow gender stereotypes,” said Kristin Effland, Youth Program Coordinator. “In the last two years, GenderPAC has tracked eight deadly assaults against gay, transgender, straight, and questioning youth, and many incidents of gender-related school bullying. These students are doing critical and necessary work to raise community and media awareness, and we applaud them.”

Students are launching the first 14 GenderROOTS chapters and affiliations at the following colleges and universities: Bowling Green State University (Bowling Green, OH); Chatham College (Pittsburgh, PA); Johnson City Community College (Overland Park, KS); Miami University of Ohio (Oxford, OH); Michigan State University (East Lansing, MI); Rutgers University (New Brunswick, NJ); Slippery Rock University (Slippery Rock, PA); Swarthmore College (Swarthmore, PA); University of Baltimore (Baltimore, MD); University of California (Los Angeles, CA); University of Arizona (Tucson, AZ); University of Iowa (Iowa City, IA); University of Utah (Salt Lake City, UT); and Wellesley College (Wellesley, MA).

“The GenderYOUTH Network is designed to use our resources to support college activists’ enormous enthusiasm

Feedback...

Problems? Questions? Disagreements? Want to submit an article? Please write to us. We love to get mail.

Board Members of Illinois Gender Advocates:

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for gender rights,” Effland added. “The leaders of these 14 chapters and affiliations are just the beginning.”

The Gender Public Advocacy Coalition (GenderPAC) works to end discrimination and violence caused by gender stereotypes by changing public attitudes, educating elected officials, and expanding legal rights.

NTAC Announces Transgender Needs Assessment Initiative

From the National Transgender Advocacy Coalition (NTAC)

September 21, 2003 – In an effort to better understand the needs of transgender communities nationwide, NTAC is beginning a series of needs assessment studies around the country. These studies will be initiated and run in small and large cities with the direct help and organization of NTAC members. The goal of the effort is to obtain accurate, unbiased information about the community’s needs and character, in part to counter the damaging, unscientific rhetoric of detractors.

“The aim is really to get clean, direct data from out communities independent of political goals,” said Julie Maverick, NTAC Vice Chair. “We have too little information on who our communities are and what are their most pressing needs.

“This can help localities of all sizes nationwide focus on their core needs. Moreover,” added Maverick, who also chairs the Research Committee in NTAC, “we have long wanted to generate new, accurate data to support our lobbying effort and provide information for national level studies.”

Individual groups and agencies in a community will conduct the study after approval of their board. At that time, researchers will survey and interview the transgender community directly. Each study will begin with a standardized survey, but can amend or change the survey to address specific problems in their region (e.g., language, drug use).

Within this framework, NTAC members will work on the ground to help initiate, organize, and conduct the surveys. Professional researchers will then take the results and reduce the data to understand its significance. The goal is unbiased, publishable, scholarly research that can be used by local and national organizations for their lobbying.

“This initiative begins in the shadow of such atrocious pronouncements about our community as Senator Rick Santorum’s (R, PA) outbursts and the questionable results of Dr. Ray Blanchard’s research portrayed in Professor J. Michael Bailey’s book, *The Man Who Would Be Queen*,” Maverick commented. “We need accurate scientific and

statistical information to properly refute political nonsense and incomplete scientific results as well as to draw attention to the deep, troubling needs that exist throughout the nation.”

Three surveys are set to begin soon: one in Connecticut and the other two in Olympia and Seattle areas of Washington State. Other studies are planned, including one possible study in Houston as well as other locations.

For more information, please contact the NTAC Research Committee at research@ntac.org.

Founded in 1999, NTAC – the National Transgender Advocacy Coalition – is a §501(c)(4) civil rights organization working to establish and maintain the right of all transgendered, intersexed, and gender-variant people to live and work without fear of violence or discrimination.

Illinois Gender Advocates Announces



Trans Youth Resource and Advocacy Youth Drop-In Center

**Every Wednesday from 5:30 to 9:30 p.m.
At Holy Covenant UMC (the Mural Church)
925 W. Diversey, Chicago
Near the Diversey Brown Line L Stop**

**For Transgender Youth Ages 14-20
Call the Youth Hotline, 312-217-1120
for more information**

TYRA drop-in center is a safe and confidential place for young transgender people between the ages of 14 to 20 to come and meet other youth who also identify as transgender, or are questioning their gender identity.

Donations Needed to Save Life of Imperiled Honduran Trans Activist

From the National Transgender Advocacy Coalition (NTAC)

The National Transgender Advocacy Coalition (NTAC) is issuing a call to the international transgender community to

come to the aid of a transgender activist in Honduras. China (born Elkyn) Suárez Mejla has been a stalwart in challenging the Honduran government and local authorities in San Pedro de Sula to investigate the rash of murders among Honduras' GLBT population.

Important Dates!

Please mark your calendars and plan to attend as many of these events as possible.

October 2, 2003 (Thursday) – Regular monthly meeting of Illinois Gender Advocates, at the New Spirit Metropolitan Community Church, 542 S. Scoville Ave. in Oak Park, from 7:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. Nominations for Chair and Vice-Chair to serve during the following year will be made at this meeting.

October 4, 2003 (Saturday) – Matthew Shepard March, starting at 8:00 p.m. from the corner of N. Halsted St. and Roscoe Ave. in Chicago.

October 10, 2003 (Friday) – Illinois Gender Advocates Television, part of the LGBT consortium on Hotline 21, Channel 21 Cable Access TV, Chicago, starting at 6:30 p.m. Guest to be announced.

November 5 – 9 (Wednesday through Sunday) – Creating Change Conference in Miami, FL.

November 7, 2003 (Friday) – Illinois Gender Advocates Television, part of the LGBT consortium on Hotline 21, Channel 21 Cable Access TV, Chicago, starting at 6:30 p.m. Guest to be announced.

November 13, 2003 (Thursday) – Regular monthly meeting of Illinois Gender Advocates, at the New Spirit Metropolitan Community Church, 542 S. Scoville Ave. in Oak Park, from 7:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. Annual meeting; election of Chair and Vice-Chair to serve during the following year. **Please note that this meeting has been postponed from the usual first Thursday of the month on account of a conflict with the Creating Change Conference.**

November 19, 2003 (Wednesday) – Day of Remembrance candlelight vigil for all transgender people who were killed on account of their gender expression during the preceding year, to be held at the Thompson Center, located at the corner of Randolph and Clark Streets in Chicago, starting at 6:00 p.m.

It began with the murder of 19-year old Ericka (born Erick) Yáñez by two policemen who had been in the area “looking for the services of a prostitute” while in their police vehicle. Upon learning Yáñez was not a biological female, they argued and then shot her. Suárez filed complaints against the officers, who were arrested, then later released.

Since the jailed officers' release, Suárez was visited by one of the accused, Jairo Antonio Mejla, and pressured to pull her complaint, to which she refused. Mejla then threatened that if the complaint weren't pulled in 24 hours, Suárez would “not see another day.”

Amnesty International (AI) has issued an urgent appeal to contact Honduran authorities and petition them to provide witness protection for Suárez. In the meantime, China Suárez is in hiding, and in dire need of relocating to another country.

The Latino/a Lesbian Gay Organization (LLEGÓ) has established a fund to provide safe passage for China Suárez to another country. The website address for online donations is <http://secure.ga3.org/02/suarez>.

Alternately, checks or money orders may be sent to: LLEGÓ, 1420 K Street Northwest, Suite 400, Washington, DC 20005. Please note on the check or money order to direct the monies to the China / Elkyn Suárez Mejla fund.

“China Suárez is taking a principled stand for justice for the lives of many GLBT Hondurans,” said NTAC Chair, Vanessa Edwards Foster. “For this, she could end up paying the ultimate price – with her life.” No less than 10 transgendered murder victims have been found in San Pedro Sula, Honduras in June, July and August.

“It is simply abhorrent that the Honduran authorities have done so little to protect LGBT citizens from serious human rights abuses or to investigate such abuses and hold the perpetrators accountable,” explained Michael Heflin, Director of Amnesty International USA's (AIUSA) OUTfront program.

“Anti-transgender violence is a worldwide problem,” said Gwen Smith, of the Remembering Our Dead project. “Such murders are [often] done at the hands of the police and paramilitary, with the assumed consent of the government. No matter how bad it can be in the United States, at least we are not facing such clear-cut genocide.”

“Appropriate action must be taken on behalf of Elkyn Suárez Mejla, whose testimony will be vital,” to achieving justice in Yáñez's death, added Heflin of AIUSA. “[It's] a first step in correcting the grave injustices against Honduras' LGBT population.”

Concluded Foster of NTAC, “We encourage the transgender community to step up and save the life of someone working to save others.”

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transgendered, intersexed, and gender-variant people to live and work without fear of violence or discrimination.

Application for New or Renewal Membership

YES, I would like to join (____) or renew (____) my membership in Illinois Gender Advocates.

Name(s) _____
Name to Be Used on Mailing Label (if different from above) _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ ZIP+4 _____
Home Telephone _____ Work Telephone _____
E-mail Address _____

Membership Level (check one):

(____) Student/Youth - \$10 (____) Regular Membership - \$30
(____) Supporting Member - \$100 (____) Benefactor - \$250
(____) Other - \$ _____

How would you like to be involved with Illinois Gender Advocates? (Please check all that apply.)

(____) Keep informed by newsletters (____) Participate in monthly meetings
(____) Participate in actions (____) Join a working group or committee
(____) Liaison with other human rights groups. Please specify _____
(____) Do you have any special skills that could help us out? (legal / legislative, artistic / design, technical / computer) Please specify: _____

Have you ever been a victim of a hate crime or discriminated against because of your gender identity, expression, or image? Yes / No (circle one)
If yes, may we document your case for our report? Yes / No (circle one)

Please mail, along with your check or money order, to:
Illinois Gender Advocates, 47 W. Division St., #391, Chicago, IL 60610